The Computer Rag

newsletter of the YOKOSUKA COMPUTER CLUB
News, Gossip & Innuendo from the Western Pacific
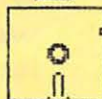
Local Gossip

November Meetings: will be held on the second Wed., Nov. 13, and the third Tues., Nov. 19, both at 6 p.m. in OEC (top floor of Barracks "C"). Barracks "C" will be torn down sometime in the next year, and in any case our landlord, OEC, will be leaving soon. Anyone with ideas on other meeting locations should please contact the newsletter editor at 234-4326.

Newsletter Problems: Navy Publications and Printing is having difficulties printing the newsletter in a timely fashion. Because of other commitments, they want a minimum of two weeks to print the newsletter -- which means the newsletter can't contain much "news." Anyone who knows of another place to do photocopying, preferably with a much shorter work cycle, should call the newsletter editor at 234-4326.

Computer Faire: the Second Annual Yokosuka Computer Club Computer Faire will be held Nov. 2 (see ad). Exhibitors are reminded to bring extension cords, surge protectors, etc. The Navy Exchange does not want any food in the Coffee House during the Faire, which should please computer owners. Volunteers to help sign in people at the door, answer general questions, and help with disasters are welcome. Call Lawrence Charters at 234-4326 or David Gibbs at 234-3386. [There is a chance I won't be in Yokosuka on the day of the Faire, in which case David Gibbs will be drafted to act as Faire Director. Please treat him with more kindness and courtesy than you would me. This shouldn't prove too difficult.]

NEX News: A-33 is now stocking Microsoft Word, File, and Chart for the Macintosh, as well as Ensemble, ThinkTank (regular and 512K), and other goodies. These are not displayed with the Apple II software; they are in a separate cabinet. Rumor has it Apple has dropped the 128K Macintosh, which suggests the "Fat Mac" will be the only kind carried by the Exchange. Another rumor indicates the new Imagewriter II printers, as well as 20 Mbyte hard disks for the Macintosh, may arrive before the end of the year.

A-33 is hoping to have Commodore 128 machines in Nov. For all of you who consider VIC-20 and C-64 machines to be less than interesting, the 128 may surprise you. There is no clear indication as to whether the Exchange will carry the Commodore Amiga or Atari 520ST, but -- don't count on it.

Microsoft: has released a FORTRAN 77 compiler for the Macintosh for $295. With offerings by other companies as well, virtually every computer language, large or small, is now running on the Mac, including such dinosaurs as COBOL. While hardly anyone would want to use FORTRAN or COBOL for writing new Mac programs, large companies claim to like such languages since they are compatible with decades-old programs running on large mainframes. This is probably why Japan is leaping ahead of the U.S. in computer technology: no decades-old programs haunting the future.

Good News, Bad News: Information Handling Services, a Colorado firm, is putting military specifications on CD-ROM (compact laser disks used for data storage). With their CD-ROM package, any specification or group of specifications can be called up by using a combination of descriptive words. Unfortunately, the only people interested in this development so far are civilian firms; no government agency has expressed interest, meaning the military will continue to wade through piles of paper and microfilm.

Symphony is selling fairly well, but everyone complains it is hard to use. Version 1.1, recently released, is supposed to be somewhat easier to use -- but it has a nasty habit of destroying all data, particularly after hours of work. Lotus claims to have fixed the problem, but the bug has delayed release of Version 2.0 of 1-2-3.

Ricoh is planning a commercial release of a WORM (Write Once, Read Mostly) optical disk drive. Veteran hackers should complain.

PC's Limited [7801 N. Lamar #E-200, Austin, TX 78752] is offering a mail-order IBM AT-compatible with 1 Mbyte of memory, eight slots, one parallel and two serial ports, 192-watt power supply, keyboard, and 1.2 Mbyte floppy disk drive for $1995.

The IRS Is Looking For A Few Good Computers -- 15,000 or so. They must run MS-DOS, weigh 18 lbs. or less, have a full-size display and keyboard, 512K RAM, at least one internal 360K disk drive, and either an internal or external 300/1200 baud modem. IBM has bid on the contract, which is interesting since IBM has not revealed any machine even remotely similar to the specification.

Epson has entered the IBM PC-compatible market with three machines, ranging from a $995 single-drive unit to a $2195 machine with a 20 Mbyte hard disk. All come with a one year warranty, four times the standard.

Citizen has a new daisy wheel with an 8K buffer and switchable Diablo 630, NEC 3550 and Qume Sprint 11 capability for $599. Much more interesting is the speed: 35 cps, instead of the usual 10 cps in this price range.

Infoworld (9/16) gave a favorable review of the new Atari 520ST. Their biggest complaints: the only software available is the operating system and Atari Logo, and they couldn't find any printers which would work with it.

PageMaker, the best page layout package..in the world for under $100,000, was reviewed in the same issue. Just think: with $495 for PageMaker and $6995 for an Apple LaserWriter, you could have a dynamite club newsletter!

Mindset, creators of a fabulous graphics-intensive machine that no one would sell, has filed for Chap. 11.

Apple has released a 3.5" dual platter 20 Mbye hard disk drive for the Mac, priced at $1495. It attaches to the external drive port, but allows other hard drives, plus the floppy drive, to be "daisy chained." The drive won't be available in quantity until early 1986, and will work only with a 512K Mac.

Switcher, which allows a 512K Mac to run more than one program at a time, is now available for $19.95.

For the Apple II+, IIe and IIc, Apple has available "immediately" a 3.5" microdisk drive with an 800K capacity. It can be used in combination with regular 5.25" drives and hard disks. Dealers will have to make a ROM change on a IIc for the drive to work. Also available for the IIe is a 1 Mbyte Memory Expansion card, which at present can only be used as a RAM disk. It probably won't appear in stores until early next year. [An Apple II with a couple 800K drives would make a great bulletin board machine, don't ya think? Hint, hint.]

Still more Apple: the new Imagewriter II can print in color, has a top speed of 250 cps, and automatically feeds single-sheet paper. Priced at $595, it will probably kill sales of Apple's other dot matrix printers.

Micro Peripherals Inc., a supplier of printers to the Air Force and Navy under the Zenith contract, has filed for Chap. 11. The company insists nothing is wrong.

Software for Commodore's Amiga will be badly delayed. Commodore was supposed to put the operating system in ROM, but couldn't fix it, so put a preliminary version on disk which loads into RAM. Developers hadn't expected to fight for RAM space with the operating system, and only Microsoft has finished a package: ABASIC. Very similar to Microsoft's BASIC for the Mac, ABASIC is also slower and, because of problems with space, runs very small programs.

Atari is having similar problems, for many of the same reasons. Several software developers have started an "Anything but A" association -- write software for any machine except those beginning with the letter "A" [as in Atari and Amiga].

Commodore has announced it will post an $80 million loss for its fourth quarter, and has laid off 15 percent of its workforce. For the year, Commodore is expected to have total sales of $900, compared to $1.27 billion for 1984. Commodore has over $100 million in loans outstanding which are guaranteed by its status as a "billion a year" company; falling below this figure could put the company in default.

Mimic Systems, Inc. (1112 Fort St., Fl. 6U, Victoria, BC Canada V8V 4V2) doesn't seem to mind Commodore's problems. It is selling a $599 box which, when connected to a Commodore 64, emulates an Apple II. If someone has one of these, the club would certainly be interested in a presentation.

Sometime in Dec. or Jan. the Air Force and Navy should award a contract for up to 60,000 microcomputers. Current plans are to insist the machines be IBM PC, XT, and AT compatible, which means the current Z-120 machines used by both services may be orphaned. If Zenith (which is trying for the contract) wins the award, it will probably introduce an officially-approved board to make the Z-120 compatible with IBM machines.

Ringo, Tokyo's largest Apple II group, would like to meet with some of the Yokosuka gang. They meet on Thursdays at 7 p.m. in the Tokyo Union Church. Leave from the A1 exit at Omote Sando subway station, go two short blocks, and enter the white building (the church) through the garage side door and then down into the basement.

Please note: several people have asked recently why their computers can't talk to most Japanese bulletin boards. There are two reasons: 1) Japanese modems follow the international CCITT (Comite Consultatif Telegraphique et Telephonique) standard, not the U.S. Bell "standard;" and 2) many Japanese systems send pairs of 8-bit codes to create kanji characters, while many U.S. software packages are designed to receive just single 7-bit codes. You can buy dual CCITT/Bell modems in Akihabara, but you may still need different software to capture the codes.